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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: priority theme: challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls

Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls

Moderator's summary

1. On 12 March 2014, the Commission on the Status of Women convened an interactive panel on the priority theme: "Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls". The panel was moderated by the Vice-Chair of the Commission, Neli Shiolashvili. The panellists were: the Vice-Minister of the Secretariat of Women Policies of the Presidency of Brazil, Lourdes Bandeira; the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia, Urmas Paet; a professor based at the Asian Centre of the University of the Philippines, Carolyn Sobritchea; the Head of Policy and Advocacy at the Agency for Cooperation and Research and Development, Salina Sanou; and the Deputy Director of the New York Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Maarit Kohonen Sheriff.

Women's participation in political processes

2. Linking with the Commission's panel on the priority theme, with an emphasis on progress and gaps in the implementation of, and lessons learned from, the Millennium Development Goals, this panel focused on the participation of women and girls and strengthening accountability in the implementation of the Goals. The discussion emphasized that having a voice and participating in the political processes and decisions that determine their lives was a fundamental dimension of women's and girls' human rights and was critical for achieving all development

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goals. Attention was paid to the fact that the Millennium Development Goals monitored women's participation through one indicator on women's participation in national parliaments and, despite some gains for women over the past two decades in this particular dimension, women still represented only one in five parliamentarians.

3. Participants pointed out that supporting women's and girls' participation in decision-making at all levels, from the global to the local level, could influence public policies and spending patterns so as to ensure the adequate provision of services, guarantee women's physical integrity and reproductive rights and improve their access to education and health care and decent work. Speakers mentioned that amplifying women's voices and participation in household decision-making was also critically important and could have a direct impact on the well-being of women and girls and their families. Participants reiterated that achieving the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls would also require investing in gender-responsive accountability mechanisms to enable them to hold duty bearers to account.

4. The discussion highlighted effective strategies for enabling women's participation in monitoring and implementing the Millennium Development Goals; steps taken by Member States to ensure the participation of women's groups, in particular grass-roots organizations, in defining the new agenda; and lessons learned in making accountability central to development.

Challenges of the existing Millennium Development Goals framework for women and girls

5. The Millennium Development Goals project had produced mixed results for women and girls. Participants agreed that a dedicated goal on gender equality had been important for focusing attention on continued discrimination, but the narrowly defined targets and indicators had undermined a more holistic understanding of how gender inequality and sexism manifested themselves and were perpetuated in societies. Even in areas where progress was being reported, such as in eliminating extreme poverty and access to safe water, women and girls had not necessarily been at the forefront of that progress owing to the limited measures taken to address the root causes of gender inequality.

6. Moreover, the conceptualization of the Millennium Development Goals did not address crucial issues related to the structural constraints to gender equality. The constraints include: the disproportionate share of unpaid care work carried out by women and girls; women's lack of access to assets and productive resources; women's low participation in decision-making at all levels; insufficient attention to sexual and reproductive health and rights; violence against women and girls; unequal power relations between women and men; and discriminatory social norms, stereotypes and practices that continue to hold women and girls back. Participants stressed that qualitative change was not only about addressing the rights of women and girls; it was also about socialization and the role of men and boys and their active consciousness, awareness and involvement in addressing gender inequality.

7. Many participants highlighted efforts at the national level to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, including efforts to accelerate the achievement of the Goals, in particular Goal 3, and more specifically, the mainstreaming of gender concerns across other Goals. These efforts included the provision of dedicated

financing for gender-related initiatives; the appointment of dedicated focal points within government administrative systems and departments; capacity-building for public officials, in particular the police and the judiciary, through gender-sensitive training; the implementation of quotas for women's political participation; and ensuring the collection of gender-disaggregated data in order to be able to measure and target women's participation at all levels. Country initiatives that focused on addressing violence against women emerged as a common theme, although the exclusion of the issue from the Millennium Development Goals was noted by many of the participants.

8. A number of participants drew attention to the existing global and national challenges to addressing gender equality and gender mainstreaming, among them the lack of political participation by women and the lack of participation by women at all other levels of decision-making, including within civil society organizations. Regarding the 30 per cent target for women's political participation, participants noted that only 30 countries had reached the target and 23 of those countries had reached the target as a result of quotas. Strategies for encouraging women to participate at all levels of government — national, provincial and local — were called for, as well as for ensuring that the roles and responsibilities between all levels of government were well defined to ensure accountability for action on gender mainstreaming.

9. Other impediments to achieving gender equality and women's rights included the impact of conflict in many parts of the world; the continued marginalization of groups of women, including but not limited to rural women; the prevailing social norms of unequal power relations between men and women, which perpetuated and enforced gender stereotypes that prevented women from participating in the formal economy, owning property or being able to inherit; and the lack of mechanisms at the national level for holding States accountable for their actions with regard to women and girls. Some participants raised the issue of the need to engage more systematically with professional women so that they can represent women more strategically and also work to encourage the participation of women in all sectors and to make better use of public-private partnerships.

Lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals and looking forward to the post-2015 development agenda

10. Many lessons have emerged from the Millennium Development Goals process, both in the development of the Goals and in their implementation, particularly in relation to the lack of participation by women and women's groups in setting the agenda and the lack of transparency of the process. Some participants suggested that little attention had been given to local contexts in which the Goals would have to be achieved. Participants also highlighted the lack of alignment between human rights standards and the Goals and the lack of adequate targets and indicators for ensuring and measuring real and sustainable progress.

11. Much of the discussion focused on issues for consideration in relation to the post-2015 development agenda, in particular the importance of effective accountability mechanisms, especially at the national level, to ensure the achievement of the future development goals. Many speakers stressed the need to ensure that women's voices would be heard in the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda, as well as of ensuring women's ongoing participation in

monitoring its implementation through civil society and grass-roots organizations. Some also discussed the role of international development cooperation in the accountability processes established for the post-2015 development agenda.

12. In regard to the processes tasked with elaborating the post-2015 development agenda, many participants acknowledged the participatory nature of the consultations to date but were also concerned about the possible risk of the discussions moving back into a high-level political sphere. Therefore, many participants stressed the need for civil society and women's organizations to consult with each other and to work together on the development of common priorities so as to ensure their ongoing participation in, and influence on, the relevant consultative mechanisms established to elaborate the future sustainable development agenda.

13. Participants shared proposals on the themes to be included in the next development framework. Using an overall human rights framework and in support of a stand-alone goal on gender equality and the mainstreaming of gender equality into all indicators, those included: comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services; zero tolerance for violence against women and girls; access to justice; addressing the situation of women in conflict situations; the allocation of resources; and transparency and accountability.